



TWELFTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Evaluation of the InFocus Programme on
Crisis Response and Reconstruction****1. Introduction and background**

1. The evaluation of the InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/CRISIS) is presented here in keeping with the ILO evaluation strategy examined by the Governing Body in November 2002¹ and with the provisions of the Programme and Budget for 2002-03 adopted by the International Labour Conference. This is an independent evaluation grounded in transparent and objective information collection from a variety of sources and clear separation from line management.
2. The present evaluation, carried out by the Bureau of Programming and Management (PROGRAM) with the involvement of an external consultant, assesses the planning and organizational approach of IFP/CRISIS, implementation strategies and outcomes, management and overall performance over the period October 1999 to June 2003. The evaluation aims to develop a more in-depth understanding of how the programme is achieving intended outcomes and what measures may be considered to improve implementation.
3. In September 1999, the ILO established IFP/CRISIS in recognition of the deterioration of employment and social conditions that accompany crises of various types (armed conflicts, natural disasters, financial and economic downturns, and difficult political and social transitions). The ILO's work in crisis preparedness and response precedes the creation of a specialized programme and operating unit. A centralized capacity with a crisis focus was seen as a means of strengthening the ILO's capacity to act on its mandate, particularly in delivery of more rapid, coherent and continued response to crises. IFP/CRISIS is distinct from other programmes in that it emphasizes rapid response and integrated action as much as technical competence in a particular area.
4. The ILO crisis response has aimed to facilitate socio-economic reintegration and poverty reduction for those adversely affected. Core aims of the programme include increasing awareness through partnerships and advocacy of employment and social problems

¹ GB.285/PFA/10.

associated with crises and of the need to integrate these dimensions into crisis responses; and the development of capacity of ILO constituents and staff to participate in monitoring and prevention. IFP/CRISIS is a small programme, staffed by six professionals with expertise in crisis preparedness and response, three of whom were financed from regular budget resources. In both 2000-01 and 2002-03, approximately \$700,000 was allocated from regular budget resources to finance rapid action while some \$1.4 million from extra-budgetary resources financed additional professional staff.

5. The evaluation involved an initial desk review and rounds of interviews with IFP/CRISIS' core staff members, ILO constituents including representatives for workers, employers, and governments, management and focal points within headquarters and different field offices, members of collaborating ILO units and contacts in UN partnering organizations. Eight case studies of country-level crisis response traced experiences and lessons learned over the past three years. These were supported by field visits to South Asia and Central America.

2. Conclusions and recommendations

2.1. The ILO's role and positioning in crisis work

6. *Identifying a feasible approach for the ILO to work within established crisis-related networks has been a major challenge. Based on their experience, IFP/CRISIS has brought the ILO closer to establishing and communicating more decisively the level and form of commitment the ILO can take among the United Nations and national partner agencies engaged in crisis work.*
7. Having started from a loosely defined position, over the past three years IFP/CRISIS has better identified and established an ILO niche that corresponds more to inter-agency processes and its own financial and technical resources. IFP/CRISIS has facilitated stronger links between ILO country-level networks, through participation in national-level consolidated appeals processes (CAPs) and UN Disaster Management Teams (UNDMT), and global initiatives. Collaboration with agencies such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High-Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), is evolving more appropriately around ILO's comparative advantage in crisis work. A balanced approach, while not fully operational, appears to be emerging. It involves an ILO commitment to a predictable but limited role within the UN community.
8. Despite this success, continued effort is needed to align ILO's crisis work more squarely on prioritized needs within the decent work framework. The ILO's crisis work is still internally and externally seen as primarily employment-related. While employment provides a needed grounding for the ILO's broader agenda, a reasonable aim for the next programme phase could be to change perceptions within the ILO towards fuller appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of crisis response.
9. IFP/CRISIS will need to continue working to overcome problems due to the lack of ILO offices in some crisis countries, as well as time constraints among field staff called upon to participate in UNDMT processes. Globally, managing expectations of key partners, and determining the most effective means of participation in inter-agency committees (such as the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee coordinating emergency responses and relations with donors), will also need continued attention.

Conclusions

10. The ILO has gained sufficient experience now to adequately signal what its specific contribution can be within UN multi-agency coordinated crisis response. IFP/CRISIS should further consolidate advocacy work with key partner agencies to ensure ongoing effective collaboration.
11. In many cases, the decisions to intervene in a crisis situation is taken by senior management. Coordination between IFP/CRISIS and the higher decision-making levels of the Office should be improved, particularly when political considerations are important and rapid decisions are needed.
12. IFP/CRISIS should develop a more rounded portfolio based on continued emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of crisis response. This can both raise its visibility with international partners and reinforce the integrated and field-oriented nature of the ILO crisis programme.

2.2. Implementing crisis response

13. *The ILO needs to prioritize the choice and limit the number and scale of crisis interventions to those highly relevant and manageable by the Office. The ILO does not yet have an operationally effective process for doing this, although progress towards institutionalizing one is evident.*
14. The challenges to managing well the level and composition of crisis work within the ILO hinge around three aspects: (1) the selection and use of criteria to decide when, where and how to intervene; (2) enabling timely and reliable ongoing crisis response; and (3) ensuring that internal and external exit strategies adequately address issues related to crisis work.

Decision criteria for intervention

15. The IFP/CRISIS approach to targeting crises for response currently combines classifying crises by their type and screening through criteria related to the impact on employment, income and fundamental Conventions, as well as country capacities, constituent demands, availability of relevant staff, degree of UN involvement and likelihood of sustained ILO impact. In practice, while these means of screening appear sound, adherence to their regular application has proven difficult; both deserve review to make them more effective.
16. The decision criteria to intervene are dependent on a basket of issues, many of which have been identified accurately by IFP/CRISIS. However, though the existing criteria remain relevant, their application is primarily from the viewpoint of IFP/CRISIS staff, and decisions may depend on their workload at a particular time (including the number of crises being handled and their other work responsibilities). In many cases, the decision to respond to a crisis should be taken by units that are close to the crisis, both technically and geographically, and that have the capability to ensure a sustained response.
17. Because support for immediate response and subsequent follow-up will involve commitment of time and resources of field offices, an informed decision of whether and how to intervene should continue to involve the field, if not rest with the field. Also evident is the need for additional appraisal of a broader ILO capacity to respond both initially and on a longer term. Finally, although the political dimension of crisis response decisions cannot be avoided, these decisions can be more effectively managed through improved transparency and dialogue during the planning process.

Timely and reliable crisis response

18. The ILO faces major challenges when launching a rapid response effort. Working within these constraints, IFP/CRISIS often achieved rapid response on a case-by-case basis, but only through a concerted effort to work around institutional constraints. Streamlined organizational practices are also needed to ensure efficient and timely crisis response. These include improving the means to finance response work, facilitating quick turnaround of administrative procedures, and rapidly mobilizing effective teams to ensure that the right people become and stay involved.
19. The Rapid Action Fund, established by IFP/CRISIS and currently fully financed from the ILO regular budget, has proven a critical means of response; however, additional funding for this purpose needs to be found. Internal cost-sharing with the regions and technical units has emerged as a workable solution in some cases. In addition, extra-budgetary funding to support initial response work within IFP/CRISIS is required.
20. The overall level of resources earmarked throughout the Office for crisis will need to fit within existing allocations. Given tight budgeting throughout the Office, the level of funding regions and subregions they want to earmark for crisis response can indicate the relative importance they place on such work. A detailed analysis of the functioning of the Rapid Action Fund and of the surplus funds managed by the regions for crises would be desirable.

Exit strategies and technical cooperation

21. Exit strategies are needed to ensure that crisis response leads to sustainable long-term action. This means that rapid response is replaced by projects managed by other units. The principal case is where responsibilities are handed over to field management. Exit strategies have not been easy to develop. Participation of field and technical units in identifying these has sometimes been delayed, and contingencies not adequately considered.
22. IFP/CRISIS relies heavily on technical units in headquarters and field staff to develop proposals and implement subsequent projects. Experience to date indicates that additional refinement of joint planning with attention to capacities and priority themes would be worthwhile. Staff feedback suggests there is need to review procedures for transferring responsibility for technical backstopping to field and technical units. In a few cases, IFP/CRISIS has retained responsibility for technical backstopping of extra-budgetary projects, a situation that is causing some confusion among other headquarters technical units.
23. The ILO's crisis responses are very often dependent on extra-budgetary funding for successful development. Fund-raising for crisis-related technical cooperation has not proven easy but lessons learned have brought the ILO some successes. Existing ILO procedures have turned out to be difficult, as traditional donors are not necessarily donors for crisis response. Potential to approach non-traditional ILO donors exists and this is being explored collaboratively by the Development Cooperation Department (CODEV) and IFP/CRISIS.
24. Rapid and effective crisis responses are also linked to field staff fully realizing what their role and responsibilities should be and how they should work with other parts of the ILO and international agencies. Field and headquarters' staff are unevenly informed of the constraints facing the IFP/CRISIS team and vice versa. IFP/CRISIS has invested in training of staff on crisis response within limited resources.

Conclusions

25. IFP/CRISIS should further emphasize field ownership of crisis response. With IFP/CRISIS' own availability becoming less certain through mounting workloads, field and headquarters' units should establish contingency plans for managing crisis work, including expert consultant rosters.
26. The shortage of funds for rapid response can be addressed, to a limited extent, by regions and technical units but requires a focused effort to find extra-budgetary funding. Funding mechanisms should be accompanied by appropriate guidelines for accessing funds.
27. Exit strategies should be more thoroughly identified and discussed by ILO field offices, constituents and UN partners.
28. Increased extra-budgetary funding is important to long-term success. However, a sustainable growth strategy must address capacity issues, particularly in the field, and simultaneously open new windows within donor agencies so as to preserve funding for the ILO's existing work.

2.3. Mainstreaming crisis within the ILO

29. *IFP/CRISIS has strengthened the ILO crisis response capacities. Internal financial and organizational constraints combined with an over-ambitious programme have inhibited its effectiveness.*

Training and tools development

30. Inter-agency crisis coordination relies on country-level strategies and resource mobilization initiatives. ILO field offices are in a better position to appraise constituent demand, national political contexts and local capacity for rapid response.
31. IFP/CRISIS has developed tools and training enabling field teams and constituents to be more independent in managing crisis response. Tools and knowledge development materials have increased awareness and guided staff and constituents in preventing, preparing for and responding to crises. Training has focused on essential knowledge in crisis response and key capacities in organizing a response, choosing partners, working with donor institutions and conducting rapid needs assessments. Feedback provided during interviews suggests training has been of a high calibre, involved an array of specialized experts and produced good results.
32. IFP/CRISIS has worked especially closely with several subregions. These have shown substantive progress in building and maintaining local capacity to deal with crises. Staff in these areas is very appreciative of IFP/CRISIS and able to identify its successes.
33. Actions taken by different regions suggest several underlying issues. First, there are notable differences in the level of importance given to building crisis response capacity. This appears directly related to: (1) competition for resources from other high priorities; (2) perceived effort required to build and maintain a crisis response capacity; and (3) likelihood of repeated crises in the area. Related to the first two, feedback from the field indicates a preference for shorter, more modular training allowing customization of course content, optional contents and lower costs.

34. Through allocation of funds from the 2000-01 surplus, the regions gained greater authority over if, when and how to respond to crises and emergency situations. This has translated into requests to IFP/CRISIS for technical training. For example, in Africa and Asia, field offices are investing in training for staff, national consultants and constituents. Africa has also benefited from two courses specifically designed for constituents (Guinea and Zimbabwe, with plans for additional training for trade unions). These requests strengthen the role of IFP/CRISIS in building capacity.

Focal point network

35. IFP/CRISIS designed early on a strategy to combine a small core programme team with designated crisis focal points (DCFPs) in field and technical units to ensure a unified multidisciplinary response. Focal points were intended to maintain crisis-related information and networks, contribute to rapid needs assessments and promote mainstreaming of crisis response. In practice, the approach has met with both successes and obstacles.
36. The shortage of technical staff time and scarcity of funds inhibit development of the network. Where collaboration has worked, DCFP feedback suggests that initial commitment of time and effort will not be sustainable if technical and field staff do not see a longer term shared objective and some form of return on investment. Incentives need to be planned and managed more effectively.

Conclusions

37. Regions and technical units should take more initiative and responsibility in planning and linking their priorities to strategies for crisis preparedness and response. Constituent involvement should facilitate a means of setting regional strategies. IFP/CRISIS can pay greater attention to user-friendly, cost-effective design and delivery of its materials and tools. This could include the flexible bundling of components of various materials to create a customized tool to fit particular regional priorities.
38. Capacity building is most effective when targeted to demand for skills in crisis response. This should be linked to subregional and regional commitments and plans (reserve funds and focal points). There is a strong case for IFP/CRISIS to focus capacity-building efforts on those subregions most interested in developing and maintaining crisis-related capacities; these also could be the most willing to invest resources in training and other efforts.
39. ILO technical units should plan for crisis response and capacity development. The focal point is foremost responsible for developing this. These plans can support demand for IFP/CRISIS training, technical support and coordination.

2.4. IFP/CRISIS role and performance

40. *The initial concept of IFP/CRISIS as a catalyst for mobilizing technical expertise available within the ILO in response to crises remains valid. There is need to concentrate more on this model and to consider alternative means of addressing related areas of work.*
41. Since its creation IFP/CRISIS activities have been numerous; its interventions have registered both successes and failures. The IFP/CRISIS team has drawn on its accumulated experience to improve the programme's operations. Combined with its growing specialized expertise, the team is better able to organize and position ILO crisis work. IFP/CRISIS

surmounted a considerable start-up challenge of working with very limited resources to establish tools, good practices through demonstrations, internal capacity and external networks. Fundamental work in these areas has been successfully completed. The programme now faces the challenge of sharpening its strategy in the face of increasing demand and using its resources in coordination with more active field offices.

42. In reviewing its strategy, IFP/CRISIS may explore alternative means to carry out some of its initial activities. Briefly these include:
- **Early warning systems.** An ILO contribution to established capacity may appear limited. Field offices with experience in crisis responses and with some statistical capacity could test the suitability of one or two indicators (such as consumer prices, for instance) in coordination with ILO statistical units.
 - **Training.** With expanded field-based interventions, there is a case for delegating more responsibility to Turin in developing training courses.
 - **Research, tools and guidance.** The evaluation revealed support for down-scaling research on crises, but for continued production of practical guides and documentation of case studies and lessons learned.
 - **Internal collaboration.** Several technical areas can benefit from improved collaboration. These include child soldiers, fundamental principles and rights at work, social protection and migration, as well as social dialogue, particularly to enhance participation of social partners in inter-agency crisis work.
 - **Performance management.** The full impact of ILO crisis response can only be achieved in the field and successful outcomes will depend on field performance. Longer term monitoring and reporting will best be done by those offices directly supporting response work over an extended period. IFP/CRISIS performance can be gauged as a facilitator of this work, with more attention paid to monitoring the short-term effects of its initial work including evidence of appropriateness of technical response, and consistency with crisis response lessons.

Conclusions

43. Despite its short history, experience to date provides a clearer understanding of the specific contribution of IFP/CRISIS, which should be taken into account in planning and programming. Goals for the medium term should reflect what is feasible given available capacities, and should reinforce joint responsibility with internal partners and constituents.

3. Overall conclusions and recommendations

44. The short but rich experience of IFP/CRISIS since its inception has demonstrated the validity of an ILO contribution to reconstruction efforts following a crisis. Experience and knowledge has been gained and consolidated on employment and social protection in post-crisis reconstruction and rehabilitation. Likewise, much has been learned in the collaboration with the United Nations and other specialized agencies and units in crisis response. The evaluation has noted that IFP/CRISIS had continually learned from these lessons and adapted the modalities of its interventions. Nevertheless, it bears repeating some of the salient findings which will require further adaptation and possible reconsideration of present modalities.

45. Each crisis is intrinsically distinct, even within the same broad category. Lessons learned should enable the ILO to narrow and apply the criteria used on whether an ILO intervention is warranted or not. The final decision to intervene should be shared with those most likely to be directly involved in managing the response. This should lead to a more pronounced role for the regions. IFP/CRISIS should continue its catalyst role by providing a centralized capacity to support effective response.
46. IFP/CRISIS should operate in the style of a task force, with the capacity to coordinate an ILO-wide response to a crisis. The regions must participate more directly in such responses, including in assessing the decision to intervene or not. The multidisciplinary characteristic of crisis response and consequent responsibilities of IFP/CRISIS need to be further highlighted.
47. Crises require urgent responses. Although IFP/CRISIS has already introduced a number of procedures to facilitate rapid decisions, these need to be consolidated. More rapid action in decision-making and resource procedures is required both at headquarters and in regions. Procedures should be introduced to allow for staff in field and technical units to be temporarily detached in case of a crisis response.
48. Sustained collaboration and partnership is essential in crisis response which relies heavily on swift coordination. IFP/CRISIS has built solid experience in this regard with the United Nations and other specialized agencies. However, the commitment of the ILO in the area of crises should be clarified, preferably through an appropriate level of representation in existing coordination mechanisms.
49. The ILO's crisis response will need to be prioritized and targeted. The ILO can increase efficiencies through streamlined practices and improved clarity and flexibility of regional roles and responsibilities. More flexible use of regional as well as headquarters' funds should be encouraged in order to make crisis response more rapid and effective. These changes will need to be made within existing resources.
50. The ILO has a comparative advantage in integrating decent work principles into crisis recovery but its effectiveness is limited by inadequate external funding. There is need for accelerated dialogue with donors to improve the ILO's resource base for launching prioritized and credible crisis response. Special efforts are called for to reach out to donors with a crisis response experience.
51. ***The Committee may wish to recommend to the Governing Body that it requests the Director-General to take into consideration the above conclusions, together with the deliberations of the Committee, in the further implementation of the InFocus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction.***

Geneva, 3 October 2003.

Point for decision: Paragraph 51.